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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001547

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EIND](#) [ELTN](#) [PGOV](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: CONGOLESE PASTORAL

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet distribution.

Summary

¶2. (U) From August 5-6, Emboffs traveled overland via the Matadi Road from Kinshasa to Lukala and Kimpese, Bas-Congo province. Recent rehabilitation of the Matadi Road has ameliorated economic hardships in Bas-Congo, but shoddy workmanship could lead to a quick deterioration of the repairs. In Lukala, Emboffs met with local government and police officials as well as the territorial administrator (AT) to discuss local economic conditions, refugee issues, and the anticipated national elections.

Economic Profile

¶2. (U) Officials reported that out of Lukala's 25,000 citizens, some 700 are employed by various companies including CILU (Cimentier de Lukala) and SEPCONGO (petroleum parastatal). The rest of the working population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, growing mainly manioc, corn, beans, and citrus fruits. The AT expressed hopes of developing commercial agriculture in the region, but cited a problematic lack of capital. (Comment. Insufficient protection of property rights and deteriorating infrastructure should also be added to the AT's list of impediments to agricultural organization in Bas-Congo. Commercial agriculture once flourished in the DRC, but large-scale farmers have refused to return since the pillages of 1991 and 1993. End Comment.)

¶3. (U) The linchpin of economic activity in Bas-Congo is the Matadi Road, National Route No. 1. It is the primary land transportation route between the port of Matadi, Bas-Congo's agricultural areas, and Kinshasa. Until several months ago, the road was in severe disrepair, but World Bank-funded repairs were carried out by a Chinese engineering firm. The road is now passable and commerce has increased significantly. However, road conditions have already begun to relapse due to the high volume of truck traffic and lack of upkeep. (Comment. Repairs seem to have been carried out haphazardly. cursory Emboff inspection revealed that the road was paved in places with only a few inches of asphalt and no ballast/riprap. The coming rainy season will likely speed its deterioration. End Comment.)

Political Climate

¶4. (SBU) The major political issues facing the Bas-Congo community are election preparations and refugee flows. Officials expressed a strong desire for elections to be held as near as possible to the UN's 2005 deadline, but were skeptical that elections would occur in a timely manner if at all. Numerous concerns including "international interference" and stalling by the transitional government were raised. (Comment. When Emboffs raised questions regarding election preparations, local officials admitted they were leaving the work up to various NGOs. End Comment.)

¶6. (SBU) Refugees continue to be a frustrating factor in areas near the DRC-Angola border. Lukasa officials claimed that some 25,000 Angolans refugees had fled into their territory over the past decade. Recently initiated repatriation programs have returned some 3,000 refugees to Angola, and an unknown number have voluntarily repatriated. Officials cited refugee problems as a severe strain on the local economy and a source of political tension. (Note. There have been continuous refugee flows between the DRC and Angola since the early 1990s as citizens fled their respective countries' conflicts. According to UNHCR figures, approximately 20,000 Angolan refugees remain in Bas-Congo. 15,000 are in UNHCR camps where they receive food and medical assistance. UNHCR officials feel that these refugees do not place a strain on the local economy, as they receive international aid and have been allocated separate land to cultivate. UNHCR also opined that any political tension in the region was likely due to the expulsion of illegal Congolese diamond miners from Angola in late 2003 and early ¶2004. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) Bas-Congo sentiments towards the international

community's presence in the DRC ranged from mild skepticism to utter disdain. More than one official expressed contempt for the election process, stating that "the international community would hijack the elections to install a cooperative leader, just as it did in Rwanda." Another official availed Emboffs of America's responsibility to rebuild the DRC, considering the fact that the USG had "taken advantage of the country." (Comment. Information flows outside of the major cities in the DRC continue to be unreliable, despite the prevalence of cellphones. Public opinion tends to be polarized due to the lack of a credible news source and a victim mentality that has developed over a century of colonization and dictatorship. End Comment.)
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